

# Great American Train Robberies.

BY JOHN P. DUXTER.

**W**E are able to add No. 15 to our series of Great American Train Robberies. It is a startling, gripping story. Strange as it may seem, it didn't happen in the Far West, where the doughty deeds of modern Dick Turpins have added so much to history. It occurred in Pennsylvania—the Keystone State of this gentle-mannered, effete East.

The spot selected was ideal. The night was dark and rainy. The scheme was well planned. The robber was a cool, calculating desperado. Nothing in the history of train-robbery reads more graphically.

## No. 15.—THE LONE BANDIT OF THE "PENNSY."

**He Just Missed Getting Away with Over \$500,000, but the Total Amount of His Haul Was Exactly \$65 in Lincoln Pennies.**



**S**HADES of the lone-hand bandits, Perry and Witreck! A Wild West train hold-up in the teeming heart of Pennsylvania, single-handed, and with a successful getaway! That, too, in this year of civilization, 1909.

Most amazing, in many ways, of all the fourteen "Great American Train Robberies" told in *THE RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE*, is this, the fifteenth and final story in the series. Here, almost under our very eyes, is pulled off one of the last, if not the last, of the big deeds of daring of the road-agents of the rail. For, meanwhile, the gentle art of train-robbery is passing into decline and fall, and the figures of Jesse James, Hedgepeth, Evans, Sontag, Morgan, Searcey, the Younger gang, the "Wild Bunch," are receding into history.

Only the most colossal nerve, aided by equally unusual luck, made possible this latest exploit. It is significant that, even after all the deviltry that marked the palmy days of the old-timers had been resurrected, this robber, in the heart of civilization, got away finally with exactly sixty-five dollars in nice new Lincoln cents!

Never, on the lonely plains of the Far West, was a train held up and looted in a bolder or more sensational manner than was the Pittsburgh and Northern Express on the Pennsylvania Railroad, early in the morning of August 31. Never was a lone and audacious robber more wofully sold than the man who pulled off this job—he actually missed getting over half a million dollars.

Lewistown Narrows, where the deed was done, is ideally located for just such

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a purpose. Threading its serpentine course in and out among the mountains of Pennsylvania, the Juniata River is closely paralleled by the Pennsylvania Railroad.

It is one of the most wildly beautiful spots in the Alleghenies. For miles on this side of the river not a house is to be found, though the Narrows is only fifty-three miles from Harrisburg, the State capital. On one side is the river; on the other are the mountains, rising abruptly and forming a deep, narrow gorge.

Old residents of the section on either side of the Narrows recall that the point at which the express was held up was the scene of numerous highway robberies in the days when David Lewis and his band operated in the mountains around Lewistown and Bellefonte. The old State pike from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh passed through the Lewistown Narrows, where the tracks of the Pennsylvania Railroad now run, and Lewis and his highwaymen frequently held up stage-coaches bound east or west.

They continued to operate from 1814 to 1820, when Lewis and his chief lieutenant, Connolly, were captured and shot by a posse, and the gang dispersed. Since then, for nearly ninety years, no highwayman had dared operate there. That's how daring was this modern hold-up.

Had the highwayman been the most artistic of theatrical managers, instead of a vagabond but pretty well educated foreigner, as he seems to have been, he could not more excellently have staged and carried out his plot.

### A Criminal's Paradise.

The Narrows is a rift between the mountains, some ten miles in length and not much over an eighth of a mile in width, with piles upon piles of loose, jagged rocks covered with underbrush, and known under the name of "Black Log Mountain."

Beside the Juniata River an artificial bed has been formed for the railroad tracks to rest upon. At many points there is a sheer descent of thirty or forty feet straight into the river-bed. There is only room for the towpath of

the Pennsylvania Canal and the old State road between this and the abrupt ascent of "Jack's Mountain," one of the highest and most rugged in that section of the State.

The lofty mountains, more even than the tangled scrub timber, cast deep heavy shadows over the tracks at this point until, in the daytime, except when the sun is overhead, they are of almost Stygian darkness. There is absolutely no life in the vicinity after sunset, except the seminocturnal trips of the track-walker.

Once a criminal gets into the mountain fastness, he can travel far into the Virginias before coming to cleared land.

### Carried Over \$500,000.

Train No. 39 has the reputation, among railroad men who know, of being a treasure-train. Nightly it carries from \$50,000 to \$200,000. Other trains carry more money and valuables than this; but, after all, No. 39 is a pretty regular carrier of large sums. At this particular time it was a richer haul than ordinarily.

The Pittsburgh and Northern Express, as it is known to the public, leaves Philadelphia shortly after 9 p.m., and Harrisburg at 12.01. On the night of August 31, it was composed of five Pullman sleepers filled with passengers and three express cars, two of which had come up from Washington in the afternoon and had been transferred to the train at Philadelphia, while the other was from that city itself.

In one of the Washington express-cars were five big steel safes, crammed full of new bank-notes in the denominations mostly of one's, two's, and five's—perhaps something over half a million dollars.

In the Philadelphia express-car were shipments of money and bullion to banks farther west, as well as checks and valuable papers to an unknown amount. No one, except the Treasury officials in Washington and St. Louis, knew the combination of the five big safes, but the express messenger in the other car knew that of the smaller safe, in which the smaller amounts of bullion and coin were placed.



At this particular season of the year, when the East was hurrying "crop money" to the West to facilitate the handling of the harvests, the train was likely to be a particularly rich haul. Moreover, it was the thirty-first of the month, and usually there was, also, on this day over \$300,000 in the pay-envelopes of the Cambria Steel Company of Johnstown for September 1.

cars. All this the robber must presumably have known when he determined, on this dark and overcast night, to hold up No. 39.

### Donnelly Hears the Torpedo.

It was about 1.30 A.M., and the train was running along smoothly at about fifty miles an hour, when suddenly En-



THERE WAS NO ANSWER—JUST THE TWO ELOQUENT OPEN MOUTHS OF THE AUTOMATICS.

It so happened, however, that on this night the pay-roll had been delayed to a later train. But the robber must have known a lot about the inside, as the gang did in the famous Mineral Range hold-up. Some years before, on this train it had always been the practise to have a guard with a loaded repeating rifle in the coach behind the express-cars.

It was his duty to get out and patrol the treasure-car whenever a stop was made. But this had been discontinued, and the messengers and baggagemen now relied on the carbines in their own

ginger Samuel Donnelly heard what sounded like a torpedo under his engine.

He pulled back the throttle and, following the rules, after slowing down, proceeded under control. Then came another explosion more violent than the first, and a whole series of them, shattering the head-light and breaking the windows of the cab.

He turned on the emergency-brakes, and the wheels were clamped tightly while the train came to an abrupt stop.

Donnelly peered out into the darkness ahead, fully expecting to see a wreck.



Instead, a gruff voice from behind him rang out sharply:

"Get down out of there! Quick!"

Donnelly turned hastily, only to find himself facing the cold, blue, yawning mouths of two automatic revolvers. If they were pointed at you, you would tremble if even a fly walked over the trigger—the kind that will send half a dozen bullets into you in as many seconds.

Behind the automatics was a grotesque figure. It was apparently that of a short, stockily built but very muscular man. From beneath his black slouch-hat a gunny sack hung down, covering his face and even most of his body.

Slits were cut in it through which his piercing black eyes snapped sharply. Even the burlap did not tone down the rapid fire of profanity which blazed from his mouth.

Donnelly hustled down to the ground as the robber also leaped off the steps of the locomotive.

Just then the fireman, Freeman G. D.

Willis, came around the engine. He had stepped out at the first sign of trouble to see if anything was wrong with the engine. He hadn't time to report that the headlight had been smashed.

"Hands up! Be quick about it!" yelled the highwayman, firing a few shots just for the moral effect. "If either of you say a word before I tell you, I'll kill you both!"

Then followed a brief parley.

"Any mail-cars?"

"No."

"Any express-cars?"

"Yes."

"Any money?"

"No."

"You lie! Lead me back to them! And be careful!"

Fortunately, the car containing the safes with the half million dollars was the second in the train. The first car contained the single safe with the smaller amount. The engineer was forced to beat on the door. John W.



EVERYTHING THAT LOOKED LIKE MONEY WENT INTO THE BAG.





THE ROBBER HAD CHOSEN THE PENNIES.

S. Harper, the express messenger, opened it.

"What's the matter up the line?" he drawled, not for a moment dreaming of such a thing as train-robbery in Pennsylvania.

There was no answer—just the two eloquent open mouths of the automatics. Harper started back to the carbines in the corner, then stopped as if frozen.

"If you move again before I tell you to, I'll blow you up! Up with your hands!" yelled the robber. "See those dynamite cartridges in my pocket, too, eh?"

#### Lined Up the Crew.

No one cared to trifle with the walking arsenal of death after that. With the utmost alacrity the engineer and fireman jumped up, under orders, into the car, while the robber followed, and lined up all three in the corner farthest from the carbines.

Just then the messenger from one of the other cars, T. M. Clayton, stuck his head in the door to find out what was up. He didn't even have time to ask

his question, but was expeditiously lined up by the side of the other three.

The road-agent hadn't really got down to business before up came I. R. Poffenberger, the conductor of the train, swinging his lantern and calling out to know why the train was stopped.

"Throw up your hands and get back there!" answered the bandit, adding an argument from one of his revolvers while he kept the other slowly swinging back and forth on a level with the fifth ribs of the four men lined up in the car before him.

The first shot went through Poffenberger's hand, and, as he ducked and ran, a veritable broadside followed him.

"By a miracle, the shots went through his coat-tails, and not through him. But so far as the men in the car knew, he was dead as a door-nail.

At any rate, the highwayman had shown his quality—he was ready to fire at a hostile eye-wink. Then he proceeded to take advantage of the few minutes he had in which to do his real work.

Under his directions, while the fireman held open a sack, Harper was



forced to open the safe and take out the contents. As the highwayman inspected each bag, he determined whether to take it or not, ordering Harper to place it in the bag which Willis held.

Some bags of bullion went in. Then some bags of currency, and some packages of papers that looked as if they might be bank-notes. Bundles presumably of jewelry were discarded as too bulky, but everything that looked like money went into the capacious maw of the bag that Willis held.

"Right heah is whar' he broke his merlasses jug," as Uncle Remus put it.

While no one knew the combinations of the five safes of the other car, the bandit might have dynamited them and got a chance at half a million. In the car he entered, he mistook the heavy bags of uncoined bullion for coin. The bags of what seemed to be gold coin were really nothing but Lincoln pennies.

As for the packages that seemed to be treasury-notes, they contained nothing but checks and commercial paper. The whole thing made a heavy bundle, more than he could quickly and conveniently carry in his hurry to get away and start the train off again.

In fact, the pennies themselves—some eleven thousand of them—weighed over seventy pounds; and, after you drop the two decimals off, they weren't much of a haul, at that.

### Up the Mountainside.

"Pick up that bag!" he ordered Willis, when it was evident that the safe had been thoroughly looted and that the time was growing short.

"Now carry it up this path!" he added.

Then, as the fireman preceded him up the mountainside, he turned to the engineer.

"Now, you go back to the engine, and don't you stop till you get to the next station!"

After a few minutes' climb, Fireman Willis was told to drop his burden in a thicket.

"Good night and good luck," said the bravado. "Get back to your train, if you can. I hope to see you again!"

Willis was only too glad to return on

a run, and more than glad to just scramble aboard the train. Donnelly had been much too cautious to run his train out blindly, but had reconnoitered the track for several yards ahead, finding near the rails a quantity of dynamite large enough to blow up the train, provided he had not stopped just when he did after the second explosion.

Indeed, the bandit had intimated that if anything went wrong he wouldn't hesitate to blow up the train. Not five days later, in another part of the State, yeggmen dynamited a train on another road for the purpose of concealing a robbery.

### The Passengers Sleep.

While all this rapid-fire excitement was taking place up at the head of the train, only three or four of the most wakeful of the passengers in the sleepers had the slightest inkling of what was going on. Some were for going ahead with Conductor Poffenberger and putting up a fight, but most of them dived back into their berths, and got exceedingly busy secreting their money and valuables in unlikely places, so as to be protected if the trouble extended back into their cars.

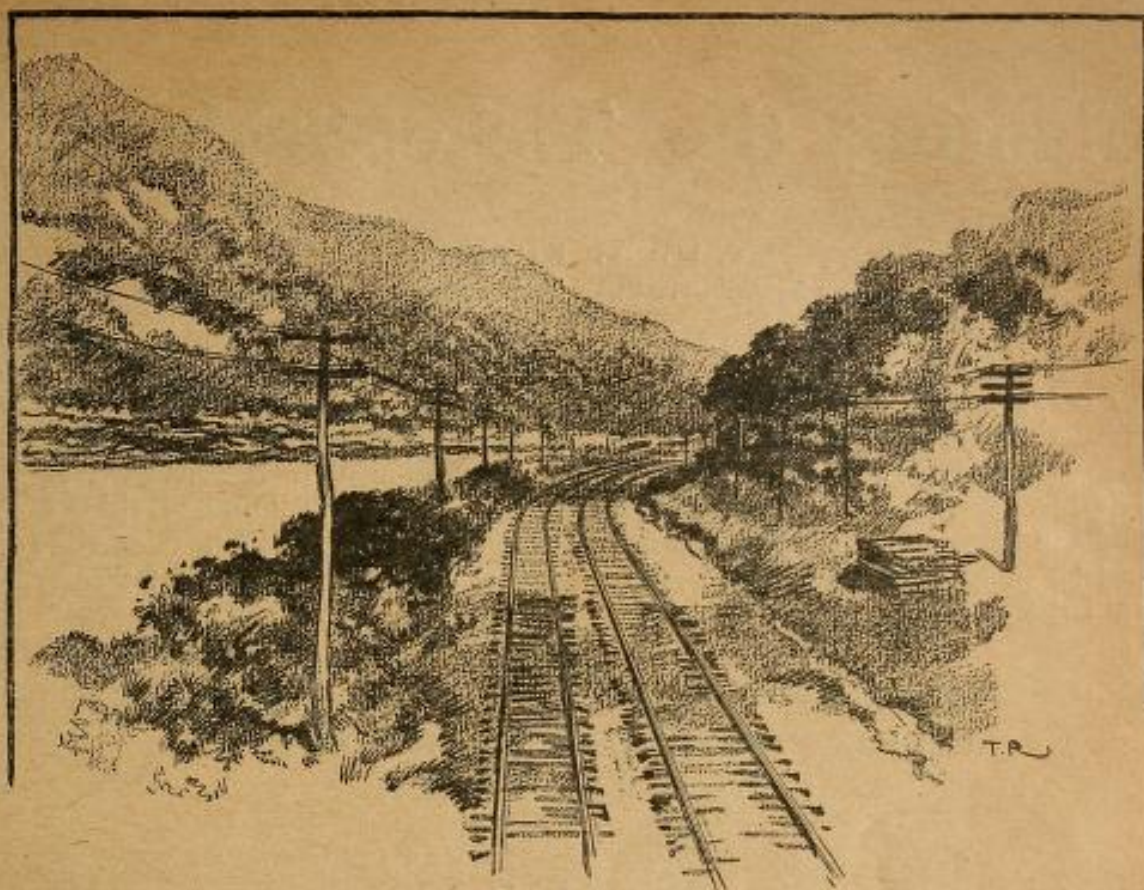
But the majority of the passengers didn't know a thing about it until they reached Pittsburgh the next morning and reporters approached them for accounts of the hold-up. The train was delayed so short a time by the hold-up that it came in practically on time.

At the first tower-station, Donnelly had stopped long enough to telegraph the news: "Train No. 39 held up, masked bandit, Lewistown Narrows, 1.30 this morning. Loss slight."

Within an hour a posse on a special train was on its way from the division headquarters to the Narrows, followed later by Willis. The Pinkertons had been notified, and were on their way; the State constabulary had sent out orders to look for the robber; local and long-distance telephones were buzzing all over the State; telegraphs were spreading the news to every flag-station, and the newspapers were hurrying the story over the land.

With the first break of light in the





LEWISTON NARROWS, PENNSYLVANIA, THE SCENE OF THE LAST GREAT ROBBERY.

East, the side of the mountain was literally alive with searchers. Suddenly a shout of joy rang out. Only a few hundred feet away from the spot where the fireman had dropped the sack, a bag had been picked up. It was heavy, and the searchers expected to find in it the pennies.

They literally yelled when they saw it was the bag of bullion. The robber had made another blunder, and had chosen the bag of pennies rather than the uncoined gold.

A few hundred yards farther was found a bag half full of pennies—the seal intact, but the bag slit with a knife. Handfuls of bright new Lincoln cents lay scattered in every direction.

Boys were set to work picking them up, and all but about six thousand five hundred were recovered. Even those made quite a load.

After the trail of pennies ended little further was found, except the torn and discarded envelopes of papers and the gunny-sack with the eye-slits.

Even when bloodhounds, kept for this very purpose by the B. and O., at Chil-

licothe, Ohio, had been brought to the scene, and had picked up the scent, it was soon lost.

The highwayman had disappeared as completely as if the darkness had swallowed him. The wide-flung net about the scene never gathered him in, in spite of the score of dogs and over two hundred officers and citizens.

And so, as usual, it was the little fatal mistakes after the big work had been done successfully that prevented one of the most daring hold-ups in the history of American railroading from being a complete success. Until it actually happened, no railroad or express official would have believed such a thing within the range of possibility on the roadway of any of the great Eastern trunk lines.

"There has been nothing like it to occur on any Eastern railway in some twenty-five years," said one official. "It won't occur again in twenty-five more. Possibly we have fostered the belief that such a thing could not be done here in the East, and were not looking for Wild-West episodes."